



## Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

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### Lincoln's First Year in Springfield

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Lincoln was a well known man in American history. He was greatly known for his presidency, his service in the Black Hawk War, and also his time in the Illinois legislature. A time in his life that was not widely known was his first year in Springfield attempting to become a lawyer. In his year of service in Springfield, the new capitol of Illinois, Lincoln's life was pretty rough. He did, however, make new friends very easily and kept close relations. In Springfield, he gained the valuable experience of being a partner in a law firm, even though at times his partner was distracted from law.

Lincoln moved to Springfield in the spring of 1837. Lincoln chose to move to Springfield because the capitol of Illinois had just been moved to Springfield, and he thought that it would have a great need for new lawyers there. He arrived in Springfield with next to nothing except for the dream of succeeding as a lawyer. As Lincoln's close friend Joshua Speed described, Lincoln "had ridden into town on a borrowed horse," taking along with him "no earthly property save a pair of saddle bags containing a few clothes." Speed owned a store where Lincoln stopped to purchase a bed with the proper sheets and blankets for it. When the total of these items came to a mere seventeen dollars, young Lincoln asked for it to be put on credit until Christmas. Then, Speed, perhaps feeling so badly for Lincoln, offered to share his room above the shop. Lincoln walked up the flight of stairs, and upon seeing the room which was offered, set down his

bags and came back down to thank the young shopkeeper. The two shared this same room above the shop for the following five years.

Lincoln quickly made friends, and Speed's store "served as a head quarters for Lincoln and a congenial group" of men who "discussed all sorts of questions from politics to religion; according to Rexford Newcomb. These new friendships helped Lincoln through a difficult first year in Springfield. Even though he never seemed to be a part of the elite crowd, he still loved practicing law.

Lincoln had made the move to Springfield to start his career in law. After his service in the Black Hawk War, a comrade named John T. Stuart offered Lincoln a partnership in a new law firm. The work for lawyers was less than Lincoln anticipated. Page Eaton describes Lincoln's despair by sharing Lincoln had "come to my (Eaton's) shop one day . . . and said he had the notion to quit studying law and learn carpeting." To make matters worse, Stuart did not seem totally committed. He "was just recovering from the effects of a congressional race in which he had been a loser," according to Newcomb. Stuart, therefore, "was still deeply absorbed in politics, not giving to the law his undivided time," Newcomb went on. Stuart's distraction gave Lincoln more responsibility in the little law office. Lincoln was forced to develop more cases by himself. Even though this caused more work for Lincoln, in the long run, it helped Lincoln learn more responsibility and have a deeper understanding of his profession as a lawyer.

The Stuart-Lincoln law firm was located across the street from the present day court house square in Springfield. The county court was held on the first floor of the building. On top was the Stuart-Lincoln office. It contained sparse furniture including "a

small lounge or bed, a chair containing a buffalo robe, a hard wooden bench, a feeble attempt at a book case, and a table which answered for a desk,” according to Newcomb.

The law firm could only afford the bare necessities.

Lincoln was reelected to the Illinois Congress in 1838 and could not devote all of his time to law any longer. Through his time in Congress, his partnership with Stuart lasted until 1844. Lincoln survived his first year living in Springfield with great friends and a small law firm. He was a great man who will not soon be forgotten in American history. [From Francis Browne, *The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln*; “The History Place Presents A. Lincoln.” 1996. The History Place <<http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/>> (Sept. 9, 2008); Rexford Newcomb, *In the Lincoln Country*; and David Plowden, *Lincoln and His America: 1809*